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## CORRESPONDENCE.

## REVIEW OF FOLK-LORE.

TO THE EDITORS OF MOD. LANG. NOTES.

SIRS:—On July 1st will appear the first number of the *Review of Folk-Lore*. It will be a quarterly of eighty pages per number, containing few original articles, but will reprint choice articles from various foreign journals. It will also contain a review of all Folk-Lore literature that may be sent in for notice; each number will probably present a frontispiece portrait of some worker in Folk-Lore and a biographical sketch; there will be a synopsis of the work done by Folk-Lore Societies everywhere, and current notes of interest to Folk-Lore students. As you can see, the new journal will not conflict in any way with journals already published either in Europe or this Country.

FREDERICK STARR, *Editor*.*University of Chicago.*

## THE 'ORAL' STYLE AND THE PARAGRAPH.

TO THE EDITORS OF MOD. LANG. NOTES.

SIRS:—In one of the most important articles that have of late appeared concerning the development of English prose style,\* Professor L. A. Sherman finds side by side in our modern prose, two opposing principles that control sentence structure. One of these principles tends to reduce the sentence to the analytic, short standard; the other tends to expand it into the long synthetic book-period. Professor Sherman finds in the latter principle the influence of that classical learning which had the effect of fastening a heavy unoral diction upon the English literary world. In the former principle, he sees a tendency toward an organic and perfect oral norm—the relation of which, however, to the Anglo-Saxon sentence so admired by Professor Earle, he does not discuss. Professor Sherman thinks that while the future growth of our prose will not be towards laconism, it will approach still further to the conversational norm. He bases his opinion upon statistics collected with a

\* On Certain Facts and Principles in the Development of Form in Literature,' By L. A. Sherman. *University Studies*. Published by the University of Nebraska, Vol. i, No. iv.

care and industry which must put all students of our prose under great obligations to him. He says:

"The evidence seemed to indicate the operation of some kind of sentence-sense, some conception or ideal of form which, if it could have its will, would reduce all sentences to procrustean regularity."

By this he means, of course, the oral sense already mentioned.

Of the existence of this tendency which Professor Sherman has been the first to note with scientific precision there is, probably, no doubt. But is this tendency finally to destroy the long sentence? How are we to account for the long sentence in the midst of such an oral style as Macaulay's? Is it due merely to a survival of classical influence? When our prose has quite acquired conversational urbanity is the long sentence, whether periodic or loose, to be a thing of the past?

It seems to me that the new unit of our prose, the paragraph, may have something to do with the answer to these questions. That is a very important rhetorical principle which is formulated by Professors Scott and Denney in their new book on 'Paragraph Writing' (p. 43)—"the full stops should be placed at the close of the larger breaks in the thought." A sentence is long or short in Macaulay according to its importance in the paragraph. A dozen clauses may be bundled together in one period to show that the whole group is no more emphatic than the neighboring proposition of half a dozen words. For the sake of this sense of proportion, Macaulay will make almost the same words a whole period in one paragraph, a mere clause in the next.

It seems evident that the part played by stress and gesture in spoken prose must be supplied in written prose partly by punctuation. In the best modern paragraphs I think it is, in general, true that the distance between full stops is inversely as the emphasis of each included proposition. If this be the case, the distance between periods will not soon be reduced to approximate uniformity, however much influence the oral tendency may have upon the order of words in the sentence.

E. H. LEWIS.

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